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SUBJECT: CHIEFS OF MISSION AGREE ELECTION CRISIS LOOMING

Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) The high-tech voter registration is fatally flawed and is lowering the overall credibility of INEC and the political process, according to nine Chiefs of Mission who gathered for a discussion on the status of election preparation for the 2007 elections. With bad news emerging every day, the Canadian High Commissioner reported that the Canadian company contracted to provide the bulk of the voter registration machines has backed out of the deal. This likely cements the fate of the highly touted high tech voter registration exercise and will be a big blow for INEC. But this latest development is also a "victory for common sense," and opens the door to a realistic discussion of election preparation needed to ensure that INEC prepares a credible voter's register and sticks to its calendar for elections.

¶2. (S) On Nov. 15, 2007 Ambassador Campbell hosted the second in an on-going series of Chief of Mission discussions focused on the status of election preparation. Representatives of the principal elections donors, France, Italy, UK Japan, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, the EU, shared their views on the progress and prospects for successful elections. While there was unanimous consensus on the failure of the voter registration process, there were several different suggestions put forward on which issues to prioritize in attempting to salvage INEC's credibility, and strategies aimed at underscoring the importance of maintaining the current electoral calendar.

¶3. (S) The discussion opened with a report from the Swedish Ambassador who reported that he had visited Iwu within the last week and been given the "optimistic lecture" on election preparation. Iwu admitted only temporary problems with the arrival of machines, blamed politicians for wanting to maintain the status quo, and said that money for INEC work was not an issue. He did not acknowledge that there was a major problem with the arrival of the registration machines, but instead, Iwu laid out a scenario in which registration would continue and 40 million people could be registered in 40 days, and if necessary, he could extend the registration period until February 2008. He said that the paper back-up with the electronic registration could provide a plan B, if necessary.

¶4. (S) The Canadian High Commissioner reported that the Canadian company which INEC was counting on to provide 20,000 of the 33,000 registration machines had backed out of the deal. The HC said that two layers between the contract and the supplier (a Nigerian company was the primary partner) had complicated the deal, leading to a lack of transparency, even on the amount of the contract, and that there was also a problem with the letter of credit. In other contracting news, the UK High Commissioner said that a British company had decided it will no longer be the supplier of the voter's registration cards, something it had won the contract to provide. He did not give details but indicated the decision was final.

15. (S) The EU representative reported that INEC in desperation was exploring the idea of buying 8,000 laptops with various software packages as one possible way to make up for the Canadian machines. Post has obtained the confidential report prepared by INEC's international consultant, which in highly qualified language, recommends against the idea because of major security, logistical, software, and compatibility problems.

16. (S) The EU also reported on the formation of an emergency UNDP steering committee tasked with developing a coherent proposal for Plan B registration. The committee would be made of the members of the donor basket and UNDP and would be tasked with presenting its ideas to INEC, supplying INEC the necessary technical advice and, if needed, money, according to the EU representative.

17. (S) The UK High Commissioner proposed a two-pronged strategy which included encouraging INEC to move forward with the process in a practical way, and emphasizing the need to keep to the April election and May turnover dates.. He also suggested that INEC, as the only game in town be supported politically. Other raised questions about whether INEC's failed registration exercise had mortally wounded its Chairman, and possibly the institution. Comment: There is wide spread speculation that Iwu may be fired sometime in the next few weeks, but there is no clear sign that this will happen. End comment.

18. (S) There was a consensus that December was a crucial month, with party primaries, a scheduled visit by President Obasanjo to the UN, where he is expected to give a valedictory speech, and also the month when a political solution to the voter registration fiasco would most likely

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occur.

19. (S) Comment: Despite Iwu's regular statements that all is well, clearly the high tech approach to voter registration is dead, and the INEC is looking at alternative way to register some forty million people. Iwu is also hinting that the timetable for registration may be more "flexible" than he has previously indicated, with the possibility that the process could continue into February. However, a paper registration process has its own challenges: the 2003 registration list has never been computerized, and, in any event is almost universally regarded as flawed. UN experts, among others, suggest that it may be easier to build a new registration list from scratch, a daunting prospect in this huge country with such poor communications. End comment.
CAMPBELL